Records & Archives Mgt Committee

Minutes

January 25, 2008
10:00am

Sudbury Archives
Goodnow Library
21 Concord Road
Sudbury, MA 0`1776

Minutes

Committee Members Present: Ginny Moore, Jane Hinckley, Sandy Martinez, Bob Oliphant, and Kaari Mai Tari.

Library Director William Tallentino hosted the Records & Archives Committee at the Goodnow Library in Sudbury. The purpose of the meeting was to learn about the process whereby Mr. Tallentino was able to create a user-friendy and content rich database of early records in Sudbury, the on-line Sudbury Archives (www.town.sudbury.ma.us/archives/), for which he is also the director. Many volunteers with historical knowledge of Sudbury, particularly Town Historian Laura Scott Lowell, made the transcription part of the project possible.

The work was done in phases over 10 years, evolving with technology from a DOS-based system that was limited to library use to a web interface with world-wide accessibility today. The software chosen early on and still in use is Inmagic (current cost, approx. $25,000; maintenance $2,000/yr). They hired a consultant who was a teacher at Simmons and also a sales representative for Inmagic to help implement the system. This program allows for organizing, searching and retrieving information. An "authority file" was used to handle various spellings and terms that are related to each other. Laura Scott Lowell was the *only* person to establish categories; the consultant also helped Laura with this. There are layers of connections allowing users to view related documents using simple searching methods.

Funding for the software and data input was provided by several local grants. Uniscribe was used for scanning the documents originally, but now they use their own scanner. If we buy a scanner, make sure it will scan legal-size documents.

Mr. Tallentino shared the grant proposals and information sheets that will be attached to the permanent minutes and not described further here, except by reference.

Step 1 in the process was to inventory the early records in various collections and establish criteria for deciding what to include in the collection. For this the purpose and target audience become central concerns. Primary sources related to genealogical and historical material from 1628 – 1700 became the first phase of the project. One of the challenges was to overcome the reluctance of various groups to share their historical holdings. This challenge was largely met by photocopying the documents, immediately returning them and then working from the photocopies for transcription and scanning and by showing them what the resulting on-line archives would look like. They also had users test-run the system as it was being developed to provide user feedback.

Questions to ask ourselves:
Who is the intended audience (e.g., general public, scholars, school children, genealogists)?
Is the first phase itself worth the effort if you don't go beyond that phase?
Who will control the intellectual content of the database?
Can we use the collection as an educational tool for local history?
How will we keep up with technology as it develops over the years and with technology upgrades?
Sudbury uses the town server and the town technical administrator installs all upgrades.
How will on-going operation and maintenance be budgeted? Mr. Tallentino believes that this shouldn't be a departmental responsibility but should be a town-level responsibility as the system supports town-wide resources.

As we are thinking about the organization of our database, we should consider joining the Digital Commonwealth (www.digitalcommonwealth.org), a portal to access all databases associated within that network of members. Sudbury Library/Archives is a member. Digital Commonwealth provides standards for common data formats. They also provide servers and consultants

Sudbury is currently working on an educational component of the on-line Sudbury Archives for local history. The are working with the Sudbury school system, particularly the history teachers.

The meeting ended at 11:30am with an abundance of food for thought for the Committee.